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This research paper was originally written for my ENGL234 course that also doubled as AASP298. The course analyzed African American literature written in the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries to help students establish an understanding of black America and how the black community developed into their current state.

We were told to write a 5 to 7 page paper on any topic that was discussed in the duration of the course. When presented with this paper I was excited by the endless possibilities, but I quickly came to realize the level of difficulty that came with that decision. My mind was brimming with so many ideas of what I could write about that the research paper quickly became a cluttered mess. I decided to call my sister and she provided me with clear-cut advice that helped me formulate the topic that I came to finally choose. She recommended for me to make a list of topics that I believe still plagued the African American community directly and to think about how I can correlate that issue to past events in American history. Before this talk I had with her, I was trying to somehow fit everything that we learned about into one singular research paper because I felt as though every piece was essential to describing the black experience.

I came to realize that the instability present in African American families helped perpetuate the many demeaning stereotypes that the public associates with black people. I finally chose this topic and formulated a thesis around it because of its relevancy to the modern-day black community. I was able to create a link between past events and how they led to the development of the “broken black family” stereotype. Throughout the paper I discuss how the destruction of the African American nuclear family through three different American eras plays into the belief that black Americans are of less stature than any other demographic in the nation.

When we were assigned the research paper in class, the instructor had provided us with a few guidelines regarding our sources. We were required to use two sources from class, two secondary sources of our choice, and one academic article. It was very easy for me to find the two sources from class and from a secondary source, but the search of the academic article had me stumped. In high school, we were often provided with a singular online database or novel to get all our information from. The plethora of sources that the university had to provide among the six different libraries on campus had me extremely overwhelmed. I visited McKeldin personally and tried to find a book that I could use to support my thesis but had no luck the first day. After talking to an upperclassman I knew, he showed me “Academic Search Ultimate” that was present on the “university libraries” website. This expedited my research process and made it much easier to find credible sources. I started the whole process by listing my main points, my supporting ideas to justify my thesis, and finding out how the required sources could fit into my paper. When I finished with that process I was able to easily identify what was missing and what types of academic articles I needed to find to support my ideas.

I went to the online data base and typed in keywords that were crucial to my research such as “black criminality” or “black family migration.” After selecting a source that had my keywords present, I read the introductory portions then looked at the sub headlines to find the portion that

included what would be most useful to me. I also used the literature we read in class, the videos we watched, and news articles that discussed extensive details on my topic.

During my time in high school, everything was outlined for us prior to beginning our papers so it never required this much work. This research paper was lengthy and required a lot of extra work yet it became the most intriguing piece of paper I have written thus far. I have learned so many things ranging from how to conduct a proper college research to how to organize and analyze my ideas. Every single skill that I developed and I am working on perfecting currently will be extremely useful for my next three years at the University of Maryland. I am planning on majoring in public health and then going to dental school. Therefore, research skills will be an essential tool that I must perfect to attain success in those specific fields. I have learned that the research process is so much more than just typing a few things in a search bar and hoping for the best. I had essentially began writing this paper with so much to work with to the point that I felt like I had nothing to work with. The process of developing it into a comprehensive paper that incorporated what I felt were some of the most defining events in African American history was extremely rewarding and enlightening.

My largest regret was feeling as though I did not utilize enough of McKeldin's and Hornbake's hard copy pieces. Next time that I conduct this type of research paper I will spend a lot more time reading through the research books in the libraries instead of only relying on the online database offered by the school. Overall, this project was immensely rewarding and I felt as though it was an incredible beginning to the rest of my literary journey at the University of Maryland.